

**MINUTES
of the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 17, 2015
Room 307, State Capitol
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Senator Richard C. Martinez, co-chair, on June 17, 2015 at 9:10 a.m. in Room 307 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Sen. Richard C. Martinez, Co-Chair
Rep. Bob Wooley, Co-Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.

Absent

Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton
Sen. Daniel A. Ivey-Soto

Advisory Members

Rep. Jim Dines
Sen. John Pinto
Rep. John L. Zimmerman

Rep. David E. Adkins
Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Rick Little
Sen. Michael Padilla
Sen. William H. Payne
Sen. William E. Sharer
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, LCS
Kathleen Dexter, Researcher, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Copies of all handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

Wednesday, June 17

Committee-Endorsed Legislation — 2015 Session

Mr. Fleetwood summarized the legislation endorsed or discussed by the committee in the 2014 interim and how each fared in the 2015 regular and special sessions.

- An appropriation to the Veterans' Services Department (VSD) to purchase vehicles for outreach services in rural areas of the state did not pass.
- An appropriation to the Department of Military Affairs for outreach and education projects to promote the USS *New Mexico* and USS *Santa Fe* and to help retire the USS *Albuquerque* was included in the General Appropriation Act of 2015.
- An appropriation to the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority to rehabilitate homes occupied by low-income veterans whose income does not exceed 60 percent of the area median income, with a 10 percent cap on administrative fees, was not included in the General Appropriation Act of 2015.
- An appropriation to the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department for repairs and upgrades at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire was included in the capital outlay bill.
- A bill to revise the resident veteran business preference in the Procurement Code did not pass.
- A bill to clarify the application of a property tax exemption on property owned by a disabled veteran or surviving spouse who moves to a new residence during the tax year passed.
- A bill to exempt disabled veterans and their surviving spouses from special benefit assessments passed.

Office of Military Base Planning and Support

Eric Kivi, director, Office of Military Base Planning and Support (OMBPS), gave an update on OMBPS programs and issues relating to military bases in the state.

Of the various pieces of military-related legislation signed into law following the 2015 regular session, one extends the sunset dates for the OMBPS and the Military Base Planning Commission; another revises the membership of the commission; and a third extends the deduction from gross receipts taxes for certain military acquisition programs. Negotiations are under way in Congress over provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2016, which includes \$69 million for construction at New Mexico military bases. The OMBPS is working with the New Mexico congressional delegation to insert language into the act that would further support the missions at New Mexico military installations, notably Melrose Air Force Range and White Sands Missile Range. The president's budget proposes another round of base realignment and closures in 2017, but there is no support in either chamber of Congress for this proposal.

Mr. Kivi reported on a variety of military issues around the state, including:

- the fuel plume at Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB), where pumping to remove underground contaminants will begin by the end of the month;
- a recent conference at Kirtland AFB with tribal governors to discuss airspace, training routes and noise from low-flying aircraft;
- an anticipated increase to 6,000 active-duty personnel at Cannon AFB in the near future;
- the Melrose Air Force Range expansion and transition from a fighter/bomber range to a special operations range;
- negative community responses to low-altitude training flights in northern New Mexico;
- a shortage of active-duty personnel at White Sands Missile Range;
- meetings among commanders and staff from Holloman AFB, White Sands Missile Range and Fort Bliss to discuss common issues, including shared airspace;
- the SunZia renewable energy transmission line, the federal Department of Defense's continuing objection to the route and the lack of final approval for the route from the State Land Office; and
- the joint land use study under way in southern New Mexico and west Texas that would affect military operations and communities in the area.

On questioning, Mr. Kivi and committee members noted that:

- (1) while there is coordination between White Sands Missile Range and Spaceport America on use of airspace, there is no current coordination on military use of spaceport facilities;
- (2) New Mexico's terrain, including the length of unconstrained airspace at White Sands Missile Range, offers unique military training and weapons development opportunities;
- (3) some ranchers have expressed concerns over disruptions and damage caused by construction traffic while the SunZia transmission line is built;
- (4) access roads to the SunZia transmission line will remain after construction is complete to facilitate maintenance and repairs to the line should it be damaged in a military operation; and
- (5) Governor Martinez favors changing the SunZia route.

Veterans' Services Department — Overview

Brigadier General Jack R. Fox, secretary, VSD, and Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, VSD, reported to the committee on recent changes and ongoing initiatives at the VSD. A major goal for the department is to address transportation needs for veterans trying to access health care through the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system. Other goals include addressing long-term care needs for veterans and challenges faced by female veterans.

The VSD has hired a full-time health care coordinator to develop a database of and alliances among the various federal, state and private health care facilities in the state to ensure

that veterans can fully access their health care benefits, whether locally or at major VA facilities. The VA hospital in Albuquerque is developing a transport system of vans and full-time drivers, and the VSD is developing transportation partnerships among state agencies, the VA and veterans' organizations to create a statewide network available to veterans who must travel long distances for their health care.

The VSD recently received two VA grants: \$2 million for a pilot project aimed at helping post-9/11 veterans in rural and underserved areas register for VA benefits and adjust to civilian life; and \$6 million, matched by \$600,000 in state funds, to build four state veterans cemeteries. Construction will begin for a cemetery in Fort Stanton on Veterans' Day in 2015 and for a cemetery in Gallup in 2016, with construction on cemeteries in Angel Fire and Carlsbad to follow.

On questioning, the presenters and committee members noted that:

- (1) there are approximately 95,000 elderly veterans in the state but only 192 long-term care beds available to veterans at state facilities;
- (2) home health care services are available through the VA;
- (3) private long-term care and assisted living facilities can contract with the VA to provide services to veterans, but only if the facilities meet VA standards; and
- (4) roads within the Fort Bayard facility, which is under General Services Department control and which includes a veterans cemetery, are in poor condition and causing a problem for funeral processions.

National Guard of New Mexico Update

Brigadier General Juan L. Griego, deputy adjutant general, National Guard of New Mexico (Guard), provided an update on the Guard's current operations and recent legislative initiatives.

Guard members are deployed in two operations in Kuwait, with individuals also deployed for specialty positions in Greece, Afghanistan and Djibouti. The Guard continues its work with Costa Rica through the State Partnership Program and will renew the program's charter in July, and its counter-drug program is under way through the end of September. Though New Mexico's Army Guard has seen a higher-than-ideal attrition rate in the last year, its Air Guard has maintained strength at nearly 100 percent. To address recruitment and retention issues, the Guard recently opened a storefront office in Cottonwood Mall in Albuquerque. Full operational funding was restored in 2015 for the Guard's Roswell-based Youth ChalleNGe program, and the program's barracks are currently undergoing a major renovation with the help of both state and local funding.

In addition to securing full funding for the Youth ChalleNGe program, the Guard's other successful legislative efforts in the 2015 regular session include appropriations for the Civil Air Patrol and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program; a benefits increase under

the servicemember's group life insurance program; and expanded eligibility for assistance through the Guard's Emergency Assistance Fund. Future legislative priorities will include state funding to address a backlog of maintenance, repairs and renovation necessary at Guard facilities statewide; funding to complete the Las Cruces Aviation Readiness Center; increased tuition assistance funding; and a statutory maximum age increase for the State Defense Force.

On questioning, General Griego and committee members noted that:

- (1) the Guard unit that used to be based in the Silver City Readiness Center has been moved to Las Cruces, and the Guard will probably divest itself of the center facility in a few years;
- (2) the readiness centers in Las Cruces and Rio Rancho need to be expanded; and
- (3) all readiness centers are built on a standard design with standard design costs unless a center has a specialized function.

Public Comment

Chuck Howe, board president, David Westphall Veterans Foundation and the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center of Angel Fire, Inc., thanked committee members for their support in securing capital outlay funds for repairs at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and program funds for a posttraumatic stress disorder program for veterans and their spouses.

2015 Work Plan, Meeting Schedule and Itinerary

On a motion by Representative Alcon, seconded by Senator Brandt, the work plan as presented by Mr. Fleetwood was unanimously adopted with the following additions:

- (1) an additional meeting day — September 15 — at the White Sands Missile Range, pending approval by the New Mexico Legislative Council;
- (2) a presentation on home health care issues for the August meeting at the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences; and
- (3) a presentation by the Realtors' Association of New Mexico on veterans' housing and property tax issues.

The committee's meeting dates and locations for the 2015 interim are:

June 17	Santa Fe
July 10	Espanola
August 18	Truth or Consequences
September 15-16	Alamogordo and White Sands Missile Range
October 23	Clovis
November 23	Santa Fe.

Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 2:40 p.m.